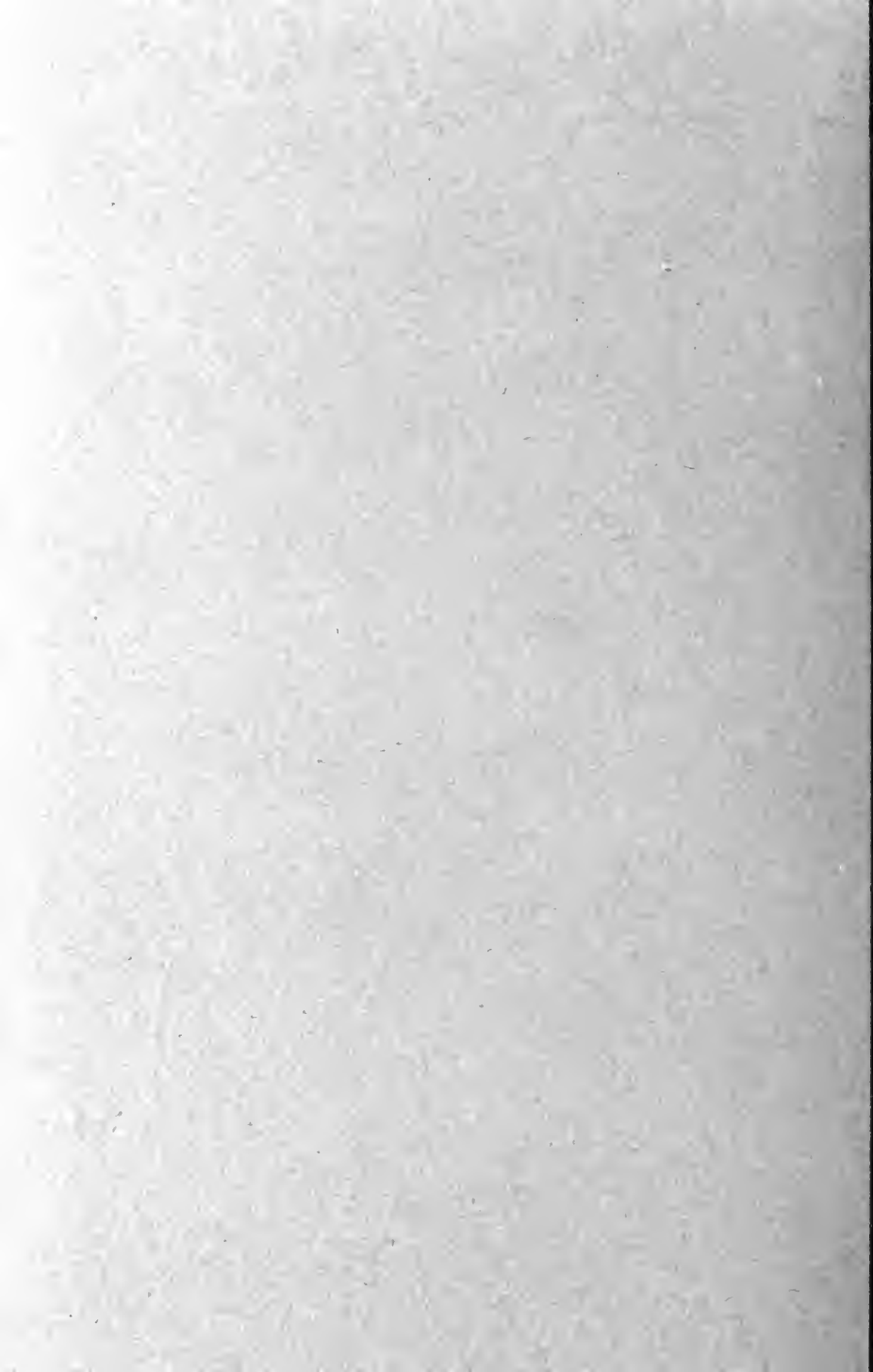


Rich. Wm. Henry,

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Books

# GOVERNMENT

BY A

## MINORITY.

A LETTER TO A CONSTITUENT.

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BY

HENRY RICH, Esq., M.P.

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LONDON:

JAMES RIDGWAY, PICCADILLY.

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# GOVERNMENT BY A MINORITY.

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## A LETTER TO A CONSTITUENT.

YOU ask me if the present Government will stand? My answer is, I think not. You say why? I tell you, because they want three things, numbers, character, and capacity. But you reply. True, yet the Liberals are so divided, that the Derbyite minority will be found equivalent to a majority, and the more so, since the Government will persevere in that conforming policy, which from time to time dexterously secures the support first of one and then of another section of the Liberal party. Playing off the one against the other.

This I admit to some extent. Probably they will try to continue the practice—it is in fact their system and their only chance of holding office, on which some of them have set their hearts: certainly it is worn a little threadbare, but they are adroit and will vary and mystify its workings. If they do succeed, then this governing by minority and conforming policy, will bid fair to grow into a part and parcel of our political creed. Before it be thus accepted, it may be well to look a little into its working. English notions and experience are against it.

In recent times, Sir R. Peel was the first who tried it, or rather who had it forced upon him by

William IV. and the Duke of Wellington, in 1834, while he was amusing himself at Rome. He played the game differently, more ably, and more manfully than his imitators. He at once dissolved Parliament, gave some programme of his conforming policy, stood by it, and when he could not maintain it, fell with it. He was out in a few months.

Before examining Lord Derby's imitation, it may be worth while to recal what one of his present colleagues said of the original, to which Lord Derby, even then in a dissolving state of whiggism, shewed a strong leaning. Sir Edward Lytton, then Mr. Bulwer,\* thus expressed himself:—

“There are some persons simple enough to imagine, that though the Tory government may imply Tory men, it does not imply Tory measures; that the Duke of Wellington, having changed his sentiments—(no, not his sentiments—his actions)—on the Catholic question, will change them again upon matters like the reform of the Protestant Church, the abuses of corporations, perhaps even triennial parliaments, and the purgation of the pension list! There are men, calling themselves reformers, and blaming the Whigs as too moderate in reforms, not only vain enough to hope this, but candid enough to say that a government thus changing—no matter with what open and shameless profligacy—no matter with what insatiate lust of power,

\* Letter to a late Cabinet Minister. By E. Bulwer, Esq., M.P. 12th edition, 1830.



“purchased by what unparalleled apostacy—that a  
 “government, thus changing, and therefore, thus  
 “unprincipled, ought to receive the support of the  
 “people! They would give their suffrage to the  
 “Duke of Wellington, upon the very plea that he  
 “will desert his opinions; and declare that they will  
 “support him as a minister, if they can but be per-  
 “mitted to loathe him as an apostate.

“My Lord, I think differently on this point.  
 “Even were I able to persuade myself that the new  
 “Tory government would rival or outbid the Whigs  
 “in popular measures, I would not support it. I  
 “might vote for their measures, but I would  
 “still attempt to remove the men. What! is  
 “there nothing at which an honest and a gene-  
 “rous people should revolt, in the spectacle of  
 “ministers suddenly turned traitors by the bribe  
 “of office—in the juggling by which men, oppo-  
 “sing all measures of reform when out of place,  
 “will, the very next month, carry those measures  
 “if place depends upon it? Would there be no  
 “evil in this to the morality of the people? Would  
 “there be no poison in this to the stream of public  
 “opinion? Would it be no national misfortune—  
 “no shock to order itself (so much of which depends  
 “on confidence in its administrators), to witness what  
 “sickening tergiversation, what indelible infamy,  
 “the vilest motives of place and power could inflict  
 “on the characters of public men? And to see the  
 “still more lamentable spectacle of a Parliament

“ and a Press vindicating the infamy, and applaud-  
 “ ing the tergiversator ! Vain, for these new-light  
 “ coverts would be the cant excuses of ‘ practical  
 “ ‘ statesmen attending to the spirit of the age’—  
 “ ‘ conforming to the wants of the time’—‘ yielding  
 “ ‘ their theories to the power of the people,’ for  
 “ these are the very excuses of which they have  
 “ denied the validity !”

This is a long extract, but it is so german to the subject, and so forcibly expressed, that Sir Edward Lytton may be glad to read it to his colleagues.

But the practical experience of this conforming policy is perhaps of more value than Sir E. Lytton’s moralities. Lord Derby has twice tried it, and despite all his ability, all his social advantages, all his resolution, and it may be added all his unscrupulousness, it has hitherto signally failed.

In 1852, the Derbyites—Protectionists they then called themselves—joining with the Liberal sections to which they were then most opposed, overthrew the Government, and finding that none of these would take office with them, undertook the burden themselves, admitting that they were in a minority, which however they asserted was more strong and compact than the majority of their opponents. They forthwith adopted the free trade budget, and affected the free trade principles of their predecessors. For a time all went on swimmingly, but when they attempted independent action by disposing of the vacant seats of Sudbury and St. Albans, their march

was rather rudely arrested. They did not resign, but on the contrary, initiated their new system by asking leave to wind up the session and dissolve Parliament, in order as they declared that the country might choose between them and their opponents, between free trade and protection. Forthwith the constituencies were flooded with Derbyite Protectionists, semi-Protectionists, Sliding-scalers, Free-traders, and waiters upon the Derby-providence; money was squandered, corruption and intimidation officially encouraged, the Treasury and the Admiralty then, as now, leading the van, but all in vain, a majority was returned against Lord Derby of about the same numbers as now, but less compact in opinion, and divided in three or four sections under distinct leaders. Thenceforth began a course of cajolery and intrigue. Each liberal section was beset by offers of combination and solicitations for aid, while the country was daily warned against the divided Liberals, and soothed by promises of conforming to their policy.

Parliament opened with the Protectionists abandoning protection—abandoning that which, if there be truth in human speech, they one and all believed to be the corner stone of England's security. We promise you, exclaimed Mr. Disraeli, amidst the shouts of his whole party, at the close of one of his pro corn-law orations, we promise you a renovated and protected England. But a band of unconverted Protectionists, some openly by their votes, others

privately by remonstrance, disclaimed this son of Beor fulfilment of their expectations. It was necessary to soothe them; and so the fatal counterbalancing sop was offered of a diminished malt and of a doubled house tax. County *versus* Borough. The conformity veil was rent, the Liberals united, and the Protectionists out. They, of course, and as usual, raised the cry of factious coalition, because their opponents being of the same party and opinion presumed to unite on the same vote. In truth they are hard to please; when the Liberals are split, they taunt them with their dissensions, when they are united, they accuse them of factious coalition. The Liberals nevertheless took office, and carried on the Government for five arduous years *with this Parliament of their opponents' calling*.

Thus far then experience is against the Derbyite device of ruling by a minority, making the sugar loaf stand on its head. But ever impetuous and untaught by experience, Lord Derby, last year, although in a greater minority than usual, (*and perhaps* because he was in so great a minority), made another rush at office on the opportunity offered by the Conspiracy Bill. He again combined, (and if it had been done by any other than a Derbyite, it might be said) factiously combined with his extreme opponents for the sole purpose of overthrowing the Government. This has been denied by Lord Derby, who in '58 repeated in the Lords the solemn farce of '52, by

bewailing the hard fate of having the Government again thrust upon him, but nevertheless it was notorious that on the evening of the vote of censure, he himself had been in the lobby and under the gallery of the House of Commons actively promoting it; while some of his followers, who in ignorance of the sudden *coup* had paired off for dinner in favour of Lord Palmerston, returned at night to vote against him. Then too were repeated the admission that he was in a great minority in the Commons, the entreaties for forbearance, and the appeal to his own high principles. In 1852 the abandonment of high principles had been jerky and somewhat coy, and moreover unsuccessful. It was changed therefore in 1858, into a methodical and almost wholesale abandonment of them. The Conspiracy Bill was ignored, Mr. Baring's India motion was forgotten, and an India Bill substituted; which hereafter will be found in the British Museum amongst the curiosities of legislation. Then came the No-Property Qualification Bill, the Church Rates, and the Reform Bills.

The old Tories winced, and the inherent disintegrating results of the system soon followed. Secret complaints and schisms in the *united* party again required keeping down by sops, first in the Jew Bill by silly, then in the Church Rates Bill by untenable, and at last in the Reform Bill by suicidal counterbalancing provisions. Even this tinkering failed, and before Parliament reassembled

the Cabinet itself was split, although Lord Derby prevailed on two of its most respected members to wear (as one of them afterwards indignantly exclaimed) a mask for six weeks, in order to keep up the semblance of union. The Reform debate came on, and the Government was beaten by a clear majority of 332, of whom three only were not Liberals ; while the Government minority was made up of every possible shade of party and opinion, from Mr. Bowyer to Mr. Spooner ; all agreeing, however, with the exception of the Treasury Bench, in one point, condemnation of almost every provision in the Bill. Yet the unmixed majority was called factious : the miscellaneous minority has not yet received a name.

Lord Derby forthwith advised the Crown to dissolve Parliament. Had he been asked this question, "Have you any reasonable grounds for expecting that by dissolving the Parliament, now only two years' old, you will gain such a majority of your own party as will enable you to conduct the Government on your own principles?" his answer, as an honest man, must have been—No ; though he might have muttered between his teeth, but I will win enough to make the Government of my successors—very difficult.

His other alternative was resignation, but that would not have suited his purpose of instilling into this and all future Parliaments a wholesome conviction of his determination to bully them into

submission, by repeated dissolutions. At all events he would create a knot of followers, dependent on himself,—Government influence in a general election was worth a score of seats—during two months something favourable might turn up, and, at worst, two months longer tenure of office was worth—something. These may or may not have been the secret reasons for the dissolution; those assigned were to heal political dissensions, and again as in 1852 to ask the country whether it liked Lord Derby's Government or not.

The answer is No. Thus, then, it appears, that hitherto the ruling by a minority is not successful. Arithmetic revolts from it: and the moral dictum of Sir E. Lytton has declared its appliances to be indelibly infamous. Be this as it may, men of all parties have hitherto held it essential that in this country all Governments should not only entertain, but openly declare and stand by, certain well-understood principles. That a Government should have, even as an individual, a conscience; that it should believe one course of policy (that which its own party professes) to be essentially better than that of its opponents; and, as a consequence obvious to all honest minds, that when it cannot carry out its own policy it will never stoop to become the mere tool for carrying out what it considers the mischievous policy of its opponents.

The upshot seems to be, that this device of a minority ruling by a conforming policy, "stealing

one's opponent's clothes," as Mr. Disraeli once called it, necessarily carries its own death within its bosom, unless indeed it can drag the consciences of its own supporters and public opinion down to its own low level. It may be worth while to record what, from practice, appears to be its special code.

Disclaim all expectation of office, basing this disclaimer on the palpable fact of your being in a minority.

Never miss an opportunity of getting in ; for, however short the tenure, it will raise the spirits of your followers, and increase dissension amongst your opponents.

When in, conform to the policy of your opponents, as much as the consciences of your own party will allow you ; but, when it comes to an issue, quarrel with your opponents rather than with your supporters.

Always proclaim yourselves the victims of faction whether by being thrust into office or thrust out of it.

Never resign without, if possible, first trying a dissolution.

Dissolve always on personal grounds, for your supporters may assume then any and every shade of current opinion.

In conducting the elections do not stick at trifles, for enquiries are alway threatened and seldom come to any thing.

This is no caricature, although the question does arise, how can a large body of honourable and dis-



tinguished men condescend to such practices? The answer is, that bodies of men when artfully misled, when their passions and prejudices are a little heated, when their party loyalty is at stake, and truth is veiled or distorted, will do and sanction things from which individually and in cool blood they would revolt, just as Sir Ed. Lytton would have exclaimed in 1834 to a premonitory fairy, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do those very things, and even more, in hot blood in 1859, which he was then in cool blood so sternly denouncing."

Leaders also blind themselves by a passion for success, especially when they are men with more parts than discretion, of unstable, impetuous, reckless disposition, full of ambition, and gifted with ever-ready and ever-plausible powers of speech. Such are precisely Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli—we need only look to their antecedents.

Lord Derby entered Parliament as Mr. Stanley in 1820. Born and bred a Whig, he took subordinate office under the Canningites in 1827. Several of his party did the same, and became Tories. Not so Mr. Stanley, who in 1830, was Irish Secretary under Lord Grey, and soon heated into an almost seditious reformer on the table at Brookes; in 1834 he cooled down, and quitted Lord Grey's Government with every expression of regret and regard, yet within far too short a time for his own reputation, publicly denounced each and all of its members as "thimble-riggers." In the autumn of 1834, he refused office under Sir Robert Peel in terms said to be far

from complimentary. In the spring of 1835 he attempted to form a controlling Whig party of his own—the Derby Dilly—which soon broke down; and before the end of the session he was on the other side of the House, a champion of the Conservatives, under Sir R. Peel, from whom he took office in 1841. In 1846, he separated from him on the Corn Laws, with expressions of regret and respect as fruitful as when he left Lord Grey in 1834, and forthwith joined in association with Lord George Bentinck, Mr. Hudson, and Mr. Disraeli, in that virulent, unrelenting denunciation, by which it was then emphatically said Sir R. Peel was hunted to death. In 1852 Lord Derby became Prime Minister by the combination already stated, and before the end of that year, under the pressure of a mere majority, gave in his adhesion to the abandonment of that very protection, for abandoning which under the pressure of famine he had separated from and denounced Sir R. Peel. The rest of his course has been already noted.

The career of Mr. Disraeli is equally undulating. The first that is known of his public life is that he was the editor of some obscure newspaper set up by the ultra Anti-Roman Catholic party, to resist by virulent abuse, what was then called Catholic Emancipation. In 1831 he was a Reformer. In 1833 a Democrat, calling aloud\* “for the utmost exertions to advance the democratic principle,” and especially pointing out “the instant repeal

\* What is He? By the author of Vivian Grey, 1833.

of the Septennial Act, the institution of Election by Ballot, and the immediate dissolution of Parliament," preparatory "to the measures which are likely to be adopted by a Parliament so constituted." There is still extant his ultra-Radical address to the deaf ears of the electors of Marylebone, issued from a chandler's shop in Crawford Street. Next he is found as a candidate at Wycombe, armed with letters of recommendation from Mr. Hume, Sir Lytton Bulwer, and Mr. O'Connell; and when these failed, the unsuccessful Radical candidate for Wycombe was suddenly found standing up unabashed at Buckingham in the colours of Lord Chandos, the Ultra-Tory candidate for the county. In 1837 he entered Parliament as a Conservative supporter of Sir R. Peel, from whom in 1841 he did not receive office. Thenceforth he enlisted with the Young England party, of which Lord John Manners was the leader and the Poet Laureate, until 1846, when on Sir R. Peel's change on the Corn-laws, he constituted himself the pre-eminent guardian of the political morality of public men. This brought him into close contact with Lord Derby, and then these two corks long tossing and jostling in the cross eddies of political life, became, by the natural affinities of their characters, one and indivisible. Their course has almost necessarily grown out of their characters. It would be dishonouring to call them insincere. But if they have been sincere in all those opinions which, during the last thirty years of their lives, they have so positively, and so contradictorily been

asserting concerning almost all men and all measures, it follows as a necessary consequence that neither their judgment nor their conduct can be relied on. They are both gifted with great powers of speech, with fertility of resource in debate, strengthened by a daringness of assertion almost unparalleled. These are qualities eminently conducive to success in Parliament, but also, unless restrained, dangerously tempting to the misleading of others, and thence to a contempt for men and their opinions.

Whether this be the true theory of the course pursued by Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli and their followers, is of minor import. The bare facts of their own antecedents and of the tergiversations of their two governments, are incontestable. Of their administrative powers, and of those of their colleagues, little can be said, for they have never been tried; they have been mere intrusive and transitory phantoms. But concerning Lord Derby it is remarkable, that although he held high office (the Colonies) under Lord Grey for two years, and under Sir R. Peel for nearly five years, and was both by his social position and powers of speech singularly qualified to leave an impress of his ability as a legislator and administrator, yet not a trace of him remains. All that can be said is, that he was an unpopular member of Lord Grey's popular Government, and imparted no distinctive character to Sir R. Peel's. The only act by which he may be remembered is the abolition of Slavery under Lord

Grey ; but this was essentially a Cabinet measure, of which only the management fell to him, and this he did so manage as to begin by offering the planters a loan of twelve millions, and to end by buying them off with a gift of twenty.

Both his Governments have been heavily charged with jobbery and corruption. The Admiralty was saved probably from a vote of censure in 1853, for corrupt interference with elections, only by a change of Government ; and there are now again imputations against that and other departments which may lead to very serious results. All that the public know as yet is, that the Admiralty was nearly broken up by three out of the four Naval Lords tendering their resignations, in consequence of the electioneering demands of their First Lord. This risk of paralysing nearly all the naval experience of the Admiralty was incurred in the face of an emergency so grave as to call for a proclamation, offering a £10 bounty for the immediate enrolment of each seaman. The Lord Chancellor's partizan proceedings with regard to magistrates were so far admitted by Mr. Sotheron, the present Home Secretary, as to be defended in debate by the shameless declaration, that magistrates were appointed on party grounds, when Sir J. Walsh, one of his own supporters, indignantly repudiated so dishonouring a plea. To private jobbery the Lord Chancellor pleaded guilty, by annulling his appointment of his own son-in-law (late a junior clerk in the Colonial Office) to an office of

£2000 a year, requiring judicial qualifications. Lord Derby himself, on the eve of the general election, having been only one year in office, created a large batch of political baronets, and three more Peers in addition to four others which he has thus added to the already notoriously overcrowded House of Lords. These are, in addition to those of Lord Clyde, and Lord Elphinstone, which belong, of course, to general service claims. Lord Derby has known, for a long time, the great difficulties which the considerable majority of Tory Peers causes to all Liberal Governments, how it frequently arrests the march of Government, yet to feed the zeal of his own party, he recklessly has added seven Tory Peers to the present Tory majority in the Lords, forcing on thereby, in the event of a change of Government, a dead lock or a collision between the two Houses of Parliament, or fresh and fresh counterbalancing Liberal creations. Such unscrupulous multiplication of Peers, and paring down of the noble class of great English country gentlemen, may prove, in its ultimate operation, far more revolutionary and more democratic than many of Mr. Bright's philippics, or even than the nostrums propounded by Mr. D'Israeli in 1834. But when done by Lord Derby it is called conservative.

The foreign policy has been singularly unsuccessful. The deliverance of the Cagliari prisoners was due not to the Government that formally declared, through the Law Officers of the Crown, that

nothing further could be done, but to the House of Commons that declared something further must be done.

In the Jeddah affair the Government adopted two contradictory remedies: a bombardment of Jeddah, and a reference to the Porte. Either may have been right, but doing both at the same time, like the Irishman's double alibi, was assuredly a blunder.

The right of search negotiation with the United States, after months of somewhat angry delay, was settled, according to Mr. Dallas's graphic despatch, in one short and very characteristic conference, opening with flat dissent, and then cantering through hesitation into flat concession.

Greater delays and more weakness of purpose were exhibited in the painful Charles et Georges affair, for which the best defence that could be urged by the friends of the Government was that they were duped.

The negotiations with France and Austria have had a like unprosperous issue. Those two great military nations have for centuries contended by arms and all the arts of diplomacy for ascendancy in Italy; their forces have for years been almost fronting each other in the very heart of the country; and of late both had accumulated an extravagant amount of military forces, which like glaciers were, by their superincumbent weight, steadily pressing onward to collision. It was hardly conceivable that they would be stayed in their course

by petty palliations, and by shuttlecocking an ambassador, however able, from one Court to another, without preliminary understandings with those Courts, without definite instructions from home, and without the concurrence of the other great powers of Europe. Russia was quite right. A war (she said), the sources of which lay thus deep, and which every one saw, might spread from one end of the continent to the other, could be averted, and a permanent settlement effected only, if effected at all, by the early meeting of a great congress. But our Government seems to have comprehended nothing of this, or comprehending it, to have shrunk from the honest expression of its opinion, sheltering itself beneath and running away with every fleeting impracticable proposal, whether of arrangement or disarmament, until flattering, scolding, and talking of peace when there was no peace, it found itself rebuffed on all sides, like a maundering woman at a prize fight.

If this wavering feebleness be continued, we may find ourselves encumbered by engagements and dragged into war, without knowing why or wherefore. A sufficient, not a panic-stricken state of preparation at home, a right appreciation of the war, and of the true seat of the disease, with a manly adherence to that love of freedom and independence, which is the heritage of England, may, if combined with a strict observation of neutrality, honourably keep us out of this war, and also enable us, in con-



cert with the greater non-belligerent powers, first firmly to restrict it within Italy, and then perhaps to bring about an accommodation by which the honour of all parties may be respected, and the interests of Italy herself not forgotten.

But that an outspoken independent and straightforward foreign policy will be pursued by a Government, whose home policy is necessarily and confessedly based on a shifting conformity, is not to be expected. We must make up our minds, therefore, to a happy-go-lucky course, drifting according to the chapter of accidents and of external pressure, first one way and then another, blessing our stars if we blunder not into war.

But what is the necessity for the continuance of such a government? Can Her Majesty's Government no otherwise be carried on than by an unrespected, unsuccessful, and divided minority, with the remnant of a Cabinet? We are told that the divisions amongst the Liberals are so inveterate, that the country must take the Derbyite Government or none. These are hard terms for Her Majesty and the country. That the Derbyites should say so, is natural, but that others, dispassionate men and Liberals, should say or think so, is only a fresh instance of the success with which oft repeated assertions can make themselves accepted.

What are the peculiar divisions which render the Liberals so incapable of forming a stable government? Are they of principle, and irreconcilable

without loss of honour? Are they such as render it impracticable for those who are affected by them to sit in the same Cabinet, or even to support one another? Are they, in fact, more strong than those which have almost always existed not only in the Liberal but in all parties?

Utopian unanimity, two formally clipt hedge rows of opposition, and of Government supporters would be the very bane of the House of Commons. Happily there is no danger of this, we never shall find 300 or 350 independently and variously educated and circumstanced individuals, more or less responsible to as many independent and variously circumstanced constituencies, who, however much they may agree on certain general principles, will not also entertain considerable differences of opinion and boldly support them. This is the very essence of all our broad and free discussion, and is true of all parties. At this moment, there is perhaps a much wider political difference between Mr. Spooner and Lord Stanley, than there is between Mr. Bright and Lord Elcho, and so of all other shades of opinion. In the Tory party, there are liberal conservatives who approve of the Jew Bill, Church Rates, Reform and other such like measures of the Government; others again who consent to them, and many who only submit to them. There are ultra-high Churchmen, red hot Orangemen, and now a sprinkling of Ultramontane Roman Catholics, all looking and perhaps pulling in different directions, yet for a time united and acting with the

larger and respectable body of Toryism. So among the Liberals there are extreme Radicals, and very coy Whigs acting with the great Liberal majority, but from time to time dissenting from it. The practical difference consists in the better discipline that is kept up in the Tory camp, and that will ever continue so long as obedience and repression lie at the root of the one, and progress and free judgment at the root of the other party. But the stiffer the adherence, the rougher the rent and the harder to heal when it does come. Thus Roman Catholic emancipation and the abrogation of the Corn Laws split the Tories from top to bottom, and so also would the Reform Bill had it been possible to go on with it. It had already split the Cabinet. With the Liberals their coherence being slighter, so also are their differences, and therefore the sooner healed and without loss of character. The Radicals under Mr. Warburton, Mr. Hume, Sir Wm. Molesworth, Mr. Bright and Mr. Cobden have never dreamt of permanently acting against their own party, as the Duke of Richmond and the anti-Roman Catholics did, and as Lord Derby and the Protectionists have done.

So now there are no differences amongst the Liberals involving considerations of conscientious principle, such even as the Jew and other measures of this and last session, which were submitted to by the Tories. Differences there are and ever will be and ever ought to be, and it is by the frank admission of them, by mutual concessions and mutual

respect, that their meeting forces are resolved into the co-operative progress of a great body of independent minded gentlemen. Good temper and free intercourse, and that prompt recognition of the honest differences of honest minds, which is the tap-root of all true liberality, have been somewhat forgotten amongst us, whether Whig, Liberal or Radical, both within and without Parliament each section has been over-valuing its own special pretensions and opinions, and under-valuing those of its associates. Sweet are the uses of adversity : and the reduction of the Liberal majority from one hundred to fifty, together with the appliances of frequent dissolutions, present and future, will close in the ranks, and stifle petty pretensions.

This is all that is wanted, for there are abundant elements for the formation and support of a broad and efficient liberal Government. A majority may be too large, as well as too small. Lord Grey with a most powerful ministry, and with a majority in 1832, counted by hundreds, found himself encumbered by his very numbers, which brought his Government to a close in less than two years.

Sir R. Peel established in 1841 a most efficient ministry, supported by a very large majority, yet in two years this majority began to crumble, and in two years more Lord Derby and the Protectionists had revolted, and he had resigned. With Lord Aberdeen a like result followed like advantages, and in half the time.

Lord Melbourne after 1834 had not a reliable majority of 50, and after 1837 of barely 30; he had carried the Speaker only by 10, and finally overthrown Sir R. Peel's Government by no more than 27; he was beset during the whole time of his Government by the difficult support of Mr. O'Connell and the Irish party, by Mr. Hume and the Radicals, Sir William Molesworth and the Independents, yet he held his own for seven arduous years, and notwithstanding the hostile attitude of the Lords carried many important reforms in Church and State, and in Education both in England and Ireland.

Lord J. Russell had a reliable majority smaller even than Lord Melbourne's, and he too was surrounded by the difficult support of Mr. Smith O'Brien and the Young Ireland party, Mr. Reynolds and the Independents, Mr. Hume and the Radicals; while the whole body of the experienced and lately defeated Peelite officials hung on his flanks; yet he too held his own nearly six years, and notwithstanding revolutions throughout Europe, famine and rebellion in Ireland, and an adverse House of Lords, he effected material reforms for Ireland, popularized our Colonial Government, and carried the great principle of free trade throughout our commercial and shipping interests.

Lord Palmerston for three years had not a working majority of 50, and he too had the difficult support of Mr. Moore and the Irish Independent and Priest party, of Mr. Bright and the so-called

Peace party, of the Radicals, and of the Peelite leaders who had seceded on or immediately after the formation of his Government; yet still, notwithstanding a severe financial crisis, and the calamities of the war which the country called on him to encounter, he brought that war to a successful issue, establishing and enforcing an honourable peace. It was only after his majority was doubled that he fell.

Experience therefore shews that a moderate majority offers a surer promise for the stability of a Government than a large one. At all events it is an undeniable fact that Lord Melbourne, Lord J. Russell, and Lord Palmerston have been able firmly, independently, and efficiently to carry on for a series of years the Government of this country under difficult circumstances, and with reliable majorities, generally less numerous, and certainly more divided in political opinion than the Liberal majority now just returned to Parliament.

The pleas therefore of impracticable divisions and of deficient numbers are unfounded. That rivalry has existed amongst the leaders, and that there have been jealousies amongst their followers is undeniable; but the healing of such divisions is as honourable as the compromising of essential principles is dishonest. Let those leaders then frankly, and like English gentlemen who have stood on the same side for 30 years, from the great battle field of the Reform Act until now, contending according to their distinctive characters for the advancement of civil, com-

mercial, and religious liberty; let them join heart and hand, and the great Liberal party will almost to a man go with them, not only in forming, but in steadily supporting a broad, liberal, and temperate Government, such as the late elections prove that the country desires.

When war is almost within hearing, and when a great constitutional question is by its indefinite unsettlement unsettling men's minds, it is essential that there should be a stable Government, in the face both of England and of Europe, competent to carry out its own policy, and prepared to stand or fall with it. This is what all reasonable men of all parties now desire. A return in fact to our constitutional mode of Government by a majority. Whatever may have been the causes or the excuses, valid or not, for the formation of the present anomalous minority Government, there are apparently none for its continuance, standing, as it now does, almost in mockery, at the helm of power, at a critical moment, without authority and therefore without a policy.

There may be some amongst the present Government who love office for office sake, but I firmly believe there are also many, as well as amongst those who support them, who have honourably, for the sake of upholding and conducting affairs until they could see them placed in stable hands, sacrificed their own ease and their own desires; and who will heartily rejoice, not only to be relieved from a very painful position, but to see in the present state of affairs an


efficient Government, firmly established, although politically opposed to it. For these reasons I think there will be a change of Government very soon after the meeting of Parliament.

THE END.







✓  
JN Rich, (Sir) Henry  
548 Government by <sup>a</sup>minority.  
1859  
R5  


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